

Supreme Court skeptical of Biden's workplace vaccine rule

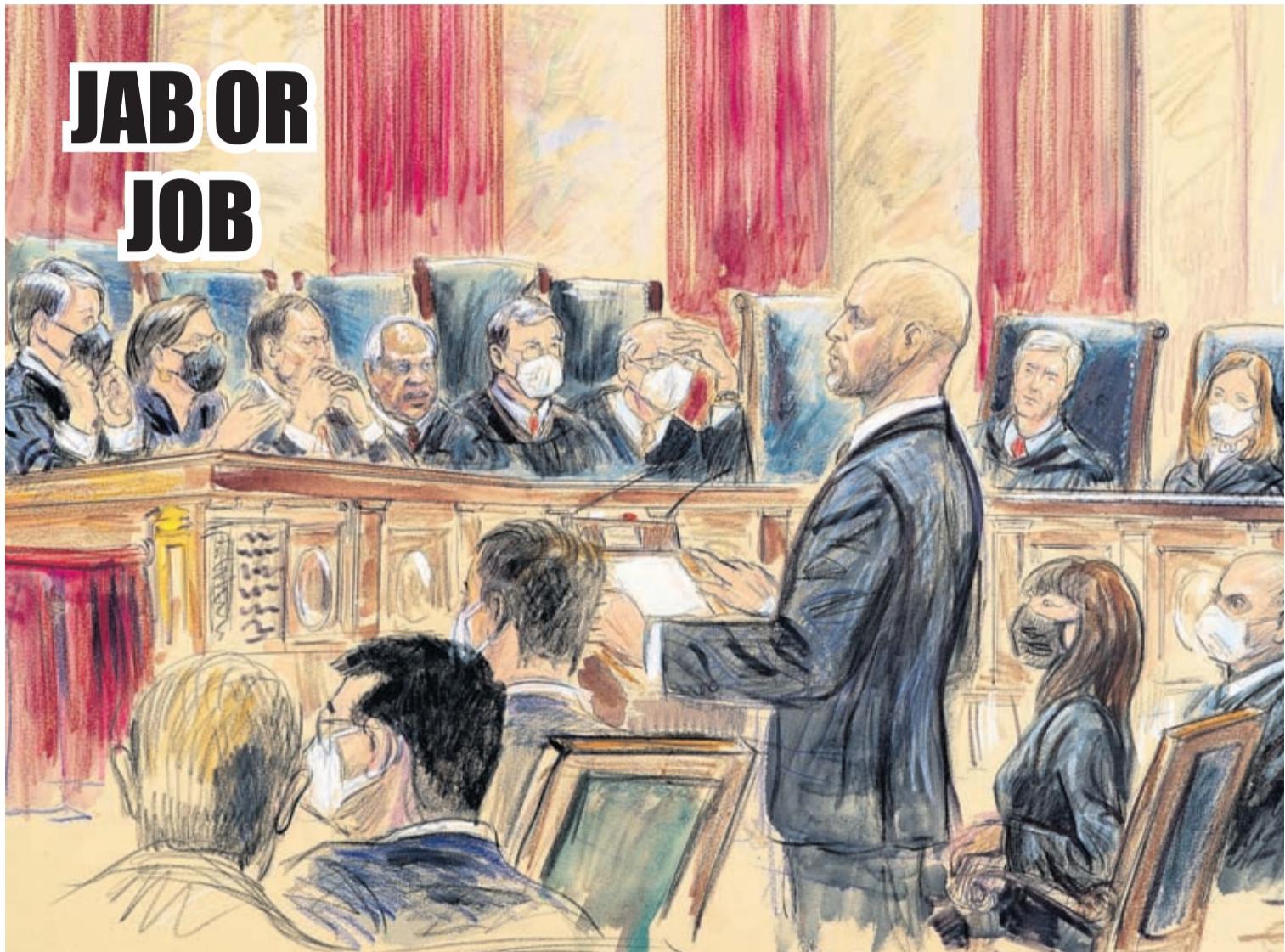
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fully vaccinated and mostly masked, the Supreme Court's conservative majority appeared skeptical Friday of the Biden administration's authority to impose a vaccine-or-testing requirement on the nation's large employers. The court seemed more open to a separate vaccine mandate for most health care workers.

The arguments in the two cases come at a time of spiking coronavirus cases because of the omicron variant, and the decision Friday by seven justices to wear masks for the first time while hearing arguments reflected the new phase of the pandemic.

An eighth justice, Sonia Sotomayor, a diabetic since childhood, didn't even appear in the courtroom, choosing to remain in her office at the court and take part remotely. Two lawyers, representing Ohio and Louisiana, argued by telephone after recent positive COVID-19 tests, state officials said.

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This artist sketch depicts lawyer Scott Keller standing to argue on behalf of more than two dozen business groups seeking an immediate order from the Supreme Court to halt a Biden administration order to impose a vaccine-or-testing requirement on the nation's large employers during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the Supreme Court in Washington, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

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Continued from Front

But the COVID circumstances did not appear to outweigh the views of the court's six conservatives that the administration overstepped its authority in its vaccine-or-testing requirement for businesses with at least 100 employees.

"This is something the federal government has never done before," Chief Justice John Roberts said, casting doubt on the administration's argument that a half-century established law, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, confers such broad authority.

Roberts and Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett probably hold the key to the outcome in both cases, as they have been more receptive to state-level vaccine requirements than the other three conservative justices. Barrett and Kavanaugh also had tough questions for Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer.

The court's three liberal justices suggested support for the employer rule. Justice Elena Kagan said officials have shown "quite clearly that no other policy will prevent sickness and death to anywhere like the degree that this one will." And Justice Stephen Breyer said he found it "unbelievable" that it could be in the "public interest" to put that rule on hold. He said that on Thursday there were some 750,000 new cases in the country and that hospitals are full.

Beginning Monday, unvaccinated employees in big companies are supposed to wear masks at work, unless the court blocks enforcement. But testing requirements and potential fines for employers don't kick in until February.

Legal challenges to the policies from Republican-led states and business groups are in their early stages, but the outcome at the high court probably will determine the fate of vaccine requirements affecting more than 80 million people.

Roberts, Kavanaugh and Barrett seemed to have



Brandon Trostclair, a grocery store owner that is challenging the Biden administration's vaccine mandate for large employers, talks to reporters after the Supreme Court heard arguments about whether to allow the administration to enforce a vaccine-or-testing requirement that applies to large employers and a separate vaccine mandate for most health care workers, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

fewer doubts about the health care vaccine mandate. Kavanaugh said it was a "very unusual situation" that hospitals and health care organizations affected by the regulation were "not here complaining" about the rule but instead support it. "What are we to make of that?" he asked.

The second regulation is a mandate that would apply to virtually all health care staff in the country. It covers health care providers that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid funding, potentially affecting 76,000 health care facilities as well as home health care providers. The rule has medical and religious exemptions. Decisions by federal appeals courts in New Orleans and St. Louis have blocked

the mandate in about half the states. The administration has said it is taking steps to enforce it in the rest.

"I think effectively what is at stake is whether these mandates are going to go into effect at all," said Sean Marotta, a Washington lawyer whose clients include the American Hospital Association. The trade group is not involved in the Supreme Court cases.

Both vaccine rules would exacerbate labor shortages and be costly to businesses, lawyer Scott Keller argued Friday on behalf of more than two dozen business groups.

Without an immediate order from the court, "workers will quit right away," Keller said.

Administration lawyer Prelogar told the justices that

COVID-19 "is the deadliest pandemic in American history and it poses a unique workplace danger." OSHA has estimated that its emergency regulation will save 6,500 lives and prevent 250,000 hospitalizations over six months.

Nearly 207 million Americans, 62.3% of the population, are fully vaccinated, and more than a third of those have received booster shots, including the nine justices.

Andy Slavitt, a former adviser to the Biden administration on COVID-19, said the vaccine requirements are extremely effective for 15% to 20% of Americans "who don't like to get a shot but they will and don't have any strenuous objection."

The high court is weighing in on administration vaccine

policies for the first time, although the justices have turned away pleas to block state-level mandates.

A conservative majority concerned about federal overreach did bring an end to a federal moratorium on evictions put in place because of the pandemic.

Both the vaccination case came to the court on an emergency basis, and the court took the unusual step of scheduling arguments rather than just ruling on briefs submitted by the parties. Unlike in other cases the court hears, a decision from the justices could come in weeks if not days. Because of the pandemic the justices heard the cases in a courtroom closed to the public. Only the justices, lawyers involved in the cases, court staff and journalists were allowed inside. The public could listen live, however, a change made earlier in the pandemic when the justices for nearly 19 months heard cases via telephone.

The court has been asking arguing lawyers to have negative coronavirus tests and participate remotely if they have positive tests.

Ohio Solicitor General Benjamin Flowers, who was arguing against the employer rule, had tested positive for COVID-19 after Christmas, had mild symptoms and fully recovered, but a test on Sunday required by the court detected the virus, a spokeswoman said. He had been vaccinated and had a booster shot.

Louisiana Solicitor General Elizabeth Murrill who was arguing against the health care workers rule, was also arguing remotely "based upon the court's protocol," state Attorney General Jeff Landry said. Landry was at the court for Friday's arguments.

It was the first time since the court returned to in-person arguments in October that lawyers were arguing remotely.

Justice Neil Gorsuch was the only justice to remain unmasked throughout the arguments, which lasted more than 3 and 1/2 hours. He sits between Barrett and Sotomayor. The court did not explain why Sotomayor didn't take the bench. □

Hospitalizations skyrocket in kids too young for COVID shots

By LINDSEY TANNER and MIKE STOBBE

AP Medical Writers

Hospitalizations of U.S. children under 5 with COVID-19 soared in recent weeks to their highest level since the pandemic began, according to government data released Friday on the only age group not yet eligible for the vaccine.

The worrisome trend in children too young to be vaccinated underscores the need for older kids and adults to get their shots to help protect those around them, said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Since mid-December, with the highly contagious omicron variant spreading furiously around the country, the hospitalization rate in these youngest kids has surged to more than 4 in 100,000 children, up from 2.5 per 100,000.

The rate among children ages 5 to 17 is about 1 per 100,000, according to the CDC data, which is drawn from over 250 hospitals in 14 states.

Overall, "pediatric hospitalizations are at their highest rate compared to any prior point in the pandemic," Walensky said.



Registered nurse Morgan Flynn works inside a patient's room in the COVID-19 Intensive Care Unit at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, in Lebanon, N.H., Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

Associated Press

She noted that just over 50% of children ages 12 to 18, and only 16% of those 5 to 11, are fully vaccinated. The overall hospitalization rate among children and teens is still lower than that of any other age group. And they account for less than 5% of average new daily hospital admissions, according to the CDC. As of Tuesday, the average number of under-18 patients admitted to the hospital per day with COVID-19 was 766, double

the figure reported just two weeks ago.

The trend among the very youngest kids is being driven by high hospitalization rates in five states: Georgia, Connecticut, Tennessee, California and Oregon, with the steepest increases in Georgia, the CDC said. At a briefing, Walensky said the numbers include children hospitalized because of COVID-19 and those admitted for other reasons but found to be infected.

The CDC also said the surge

could be partially attributable to how COVID-19 hospitalizations in this age group are defined: a positive virus test within 14 days of hospitalization for any reason.

The severity of illness among children during the omicron wave seems lower than it was with the delta variant, said Seattle Children's Hospital critical care chief Dr. John McGuire.

"Most of the COVID+ kids in the hospital are actually not here for COVID-19 dis-

ease," McGuire said in an email. "They are here for other issues but happen to have tested positive."

The nation's top infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said earlier this week that omicron appears to cause less-severe disease across the board, but that the sheer number of infections because of its extreme contagiousness will mean that many more children will get infected, and a certain share of them will wind up in the hospital.

Fauci also said many children hospitalized with COVID-19 have other health conditions that make them more susceptible to complications from the virus. That includes obesity, diabetes and lung disease.

Fauci and Walensky have emphasized that one of the best ways to protect the youngest children is to vaccinate everyone else. The surge in hospitalizations only heightens some parents' worries.

Emily Hojara and Eli Zilke of Sawyer, Michigan, are being extra protective of their daughter Flora, who turns 2 in May. They limit her contact with other children, and no visitors are allowed in the house unless masked, not even grandparents. □

White House highlights effort to cover winter heating bills

By ASHRAF KHALIL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is distributing an additional \$4.5 billion in funds to help low-income Americans cover heating costs during a second pandemic winter, with cold-weather states receiving the largest share, according to a state-by-state breakdown released Friday.

The funding boost — part of last year's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan coronavirus relief package — more than doubled the normal funding level of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP. These funds represent the largest appropriation in a single year since the program was established in

1981.

The Associated Press obtained an advance copy of the state allocation breakdown, which shows a clear prioritization of cold-weather states with higher heating costs. For example, Minnesota received nearly \$274 million in home energy assistance for needy residents. Meanwhile, Texas, which has a population five times larger, received just \$10 million more. New York state, with a population of less than 20 million people compared with Texas' 29 million, received just under \$876 million.

President Joe Biden's administration also announced commitments from seven major utility companies across the country to guarantee no

shutoffs for customers seeking assistance and to identify and notify recipients eligible for government aid. The fresh commitments, announced Friday morning, come from Atlantic City Electric, Baltimore Gas and Electric, ComEd, Delmarva Power, Pacific Gas & Electric, PECO and Pepco. They join seven other major utility companies that made similar pledges late last year.

Electricity and natural gas prices are roughly 11% higher than a year ago, according to the Labor Department's consumer price index. Residential heating oil prices are up about 40% from a year ago, according to the Energy Information Administration. The extent of the increase has moderated in recent



President Joe Biden speaks from the East Room of the White House in Washington, Dec. 6, 2021.

Associated Press

months as wholesale heating oil prices are roughly where they were at the start of October.

The aid is meant to help cushion the shock of higher winter energy costs. But Republican lawmakers have

said the overall relief package, which was signed into law by the Democratic president in March, has caused higher levels of inflation by pumping too much money into the economy. □

Arbery killers get life in prison; no parole for father, son

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Three white men convicted of murder for chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery were sentenced to life in prison Friday, with a judge denying any chance of parole for the father and son who armed themselves and initiated the deadly pursuit of the 25-year-old Black man. Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley ordered Greg and Travis McMichael to serve life without parole for Arbery's fatal shooting and granted their neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, a chance to earn parole after serving at least 30 years in prison.

"Ahmaud Arbery was hunted down and shot, and he was killed because individuals here in the courtroom took the law into their own hands," the judge said before sentencing.

Walmsley said Arbery left his home for a jog and ended up running for his life for five minutes as the men chased him in pickup trucks until they finally cornered him. The judge paused for a minute of silence to help drive home a sense of what that time must have been like for Arbery.

"When I thought about this, I thought from a lot of different angles. I kept coming back to the terror that must have been in the mind of the young man running through Satilla Shores," he said, mentioning the neighborhood outside the port city of Brunswick where Arbery was killed.

A few dozen supporters cheered Arbery's family as they exited onto the court-



Greg McMichael, right, waits for the sentencing of he and his son Travis McMichael, and a neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan in the Glynn County Courthouse, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022, in Brunswick, Ga.

Associated Press

house steps Friday afternoon.

"Today your son has made history, because we have people who are being held accountable for lynching a Black man in America!" said Benjamin Crump, a civil attorney representing the family.

Murder carries a mandatory sentence of life in prison under Georgia law unless prosecutors seek the death penalty, which they opted against in this case. The main decision for Walmsley was whether to grant an eventual chance to earn parole.

During the sentencing hearing, Arbery's family had asked the judge to show no lenience.

Arbery's sister recalled his humor, describing him as a

positive thinker with a big personality. She told the judge her brother had dark skin "that glistened in the sunlight," thick, curly hair and an athletic build, factors that made him a target for the men who pursued him.

"These are the qualities that made these men assume that Ahmaud was a dangerous criminal and chase him with guns drawn. To me, those qualities reflect a young man full of life and energy who looked like me and the people I loved," Jasmine Arbery said.

Arbery's mother said she suffered a personal, intense loss made worse by a trial where the defense was

that her son had made bad choices that led to his death.

"This wasn't a case of mistaken identity or mistaken fact. They chose to target my son because they didn't want him in their community. They chose to treat him differently than other people who frequently visited their community," Wanda Cooper-Jones said. "And when they couldn't sufficiently scare or intimidate him, they killed him."

The judge's sentences matched the recommendation of prosecutor Linda Dunikoski, who said all deserved the mandatory life sentence for showing "no empathy for the trapped and terrified Ahmaud Arbery."

Contending the McMichaels still believed they didn't do anything wrong, Dunikoski disclosed Friday

that Greg McMichael gave Bryan's cellphone video of the shooting to an attorney, who leaked it.

"He believed it was going to exonerate him," the prosecutor said.

The McMichaels' defense attorneys argued that their clients deserved the possibility of parole because the killing was an unplanned, unintentional act. Bryan's lawyer said he showed remorse and cooperated with police, turning over the cellphone video of the shooting to help them get to the truth.

"Mr. Bryan isn't the one who brought a gun," Kevin Gough said. "He was unarmed. And I think that reflects his intentions."

Bryan is 52, raising the chances that he will spend the remainder of his life in prison even with the chance of parole after serving 30 years.

The McMichaels grabbed guns and jumped in a pickup truck to chase Arbery after spotting him running in their neighborhood on Feb. 23, 2020. Bryan joined the pursuit in his own truck and recorded cellphone video of Travis McMichael firing close-range shotgun blasts into Arbery as he threw punches and grabbed for the weapon.

The killing went largely unnoticed until two months later, when the graphic video was leaked online and touched off a national outcry. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police and soon arrested all three men. □



Judge Judy Sheindlin arrives at the 46th annual Daytime Emmy Awards in Pasadena, Calif. on May 5, 2019.

Associated Press

Judge Judy funds scholarships at NY law school she attended

NEW YORK (AP) — "Judge Judy" Sheindlin has given a \$5 million donation to New York Law School, where she, her daughter and granddaughter have attended.

The donation will fund full tuition and books for 10 women a year, along with a summer employment fellowship after their first year,

the school said.

Sheindlin, whose "Judge Judy" courtroom television show ended in September after a 25-year run, now hosts "Judy Justice" on Amazon. She graduated from New York Law School in 1965, and her daughter Nicole Sheindlin graduated in 1993. Granddaughter Sarah Rose is set to gradu-

ate this spring.

Women make up 62% of the law school's student body.

"We point to (Sheindlin) as a great success story for the law school," said Anthony W. Crowell, dean and president. "It's a testament to discipline, hard work, tenacity and what we call New York grit." □

NATO rules out any halt to expansion, despite Russian demand

By LORNE COOK

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Friday ruled out any halt to the continued expansion of the military organization to address Russian security concerns, rejecting a key part of President Vladimir Putin's demands for easing tensions with Ukraine.

"We will not compromise on core principles, including the right for every nation to decide its own path, including what kind of security arrangements it wants to be a part of," Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels after an extraordinary meeting of NATO foreign ministers.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his counterparts held online talks to prepare for the first meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in more than two years. The meeting, set for Wednesday in Brussels, will give NATO ambassadors the chance to discuss Putin's security proposals with Russia's envoy face to face. Much contained in the documents that Moscow has made public — a draft agreement with NATO countries and the offer of a treaty between Russia and the United States — appears to be a non-starter at the 30-country military organization, despite fears



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during a media conference after an extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs via video link at NATO headquarters, in Brussels, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022.

that Putin might order an invasion of Ukraine.

NATO would have to agree to halt all membership plans, not just with Ukraine, and to end military exercises close to Russia's borders. In exchange, Russia would respect the international commitments it's signed up to on limiting wargames, as well as end aircraft buzzing incidents and other low-level hostilities.

Endorsing such an agreement would require NATO to reject a key part of its

founding treaty. Under Article 10 of the 1949 Washington Treaty, the organization can invite in any willing European country that can contribute to security in the North Atlantic area, as well as fulfill the obligations of membership.

Stoltenberg said a Russian military buildup near Ukraine that sparked worries of a possible invasion has continued.

"We see armored units, we see artillery, we see combat ready troops, we see

electronic warfare equipment and we see a lot of different military capabilities," he said.

This buildup, combined with Russia's security demands, and its track record in Ukraine and Georgia, "sends a message that there is a real risk for a new armed conflict in Europe," Stoltenberg said.

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and later backed a separatist rebellion in the country's east. Over more than

Associated Press

seven years, the fighting has killed over 14,000 people and devastated Ukraine's industrial heartland, known as Donbas.

Russia denies that it has fresh plans to attack its neighbor, but Putin wants legal guarantees that would rule out NATO expansion and weapons deployments. Moscow says it expects answers to its security proposals this month.

Friday's meeting was the first in a flurry of high-level talks involving NATO, senior U.S. and Russian officials and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe over the next week.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday that it's important to speak with Russia about its concerns, and that he will talk again with Putin "in the coming days."

"Dialogue does not mean giving in," Macron told reporters in Paris at an event to mark the start of France's six-month term at the helm of the European Union.

The NATO-Russia Council was set up two decades ago. But NATO ended practical cooperation with Russia through the NRC in 2014 after it annexed Crimea. Wednesday's meeting will be the first since July 2019. □

Iran displays missiles amid nuclear talks with world powers

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran displayed three ballistic missiles at an outdoor prayer esplanade in central Tehran on Friday as talks in Vienna aimed at reviving Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers flounder.

The missiles — known as Dezful, Qiam and Zolfaghgar — have official ranges of up to 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) and are already-known models, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said.

Diplomats from countries that remain in the 2015 nuclear deal — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China — are working with Tehran to revive the accord, which had sought

to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for lifting of economic sanctions.

American diplomats are present at the nuclear talks in Vienna but they are not in direct talks with Iranians. The accord collapsed in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the deal and re-imposed sanctions on Iran.

A report by Iranian state television said the missiles on display were the same types as those used to strike U.S. bases in Iraq.

The display came on the second anniversary of a ballistic missile attack on bases housing American troops in Iraq in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike that

killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020.

The Iranian military mistakenly shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 with two surface-to-air missiles after the attacks, killing all 176 people on board.

After days of denial, the Guard publicly apologized, blaming an air defense operator who authorities said mistook the Boeing 737-800 for an American cruise missile.

An Iranian military court in November held a hearing for 10 people suspected of having role in downing the Ukrainian airliner.

State TV said a commemoration ceremony for the



A man holds an anti-U.S. banner in front of Zolfaghgar, top, Dezful, bottom, and Qiam, background left, missiles displayed in a missile capabilities exhibition by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard a day prior to second anniversary of Iran's missile strike on U.S. bases in Iraq in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Jan. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

victims was held in Tehran's main cemetery with the presence of their families as well as officials. □

Polish leader admits country bought powerful Israeli spyware

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Poland's most powerful politician has acknowledged that the country bought advanced spyware from the Israeli surveillance software maker NSO Group, but denied that it was being used to target his political opponents.

Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of Poland's ruling conservative party, Law and Justice, said in an interview that the secret services in many countries are using the Pegasus software to combat crime and corruption.

Kaczynski said the use of such spyware arose in response to the growing use of encryption to mask data in transit, which defeated earlier monitoring technologies. By hacking phones, it lets authorities monitor communications, as well as real-time conversations where they are not encrypted.

"It would be bad if the Polish services did not have this type of tool," Kaczynski said in an interview to be



Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the head of Poland's ruling party Law and Justice, speaks at a news conference in Warsaw, Poland, on Tuesday Oct. 26, 2021.

published in the Monday edition of weekly magazine Sieci. The wPolityce.pl news portal published excerpts on Friday.

The interview follows exclusive reports by The Associ-

ated Press that Citizen Lab, a cyber watchdog group at the University of Toronto, found that three Polish government critics were hacked with NSO's Pegasus.

Associated Press

On Thursday, Amnesty International independently verified Citizen Lab's finding that Sen. Krzysztof Brejza was hacked multiple times in 2019 when he was running the opposition's par-

liamentary election campaign.

Text messages stolen from Brejza's phone were doctored and aired by state-controlled TV in Poland as part of a smear campaign in the heat of the race, which the populist ruling party went on to narrowly win.

Brejza now maintains that the election was unfair since the ruling party would have had access to his campaign's tactical thinking and plans.

The hacking revelations have rocked Poland, drawing comparisons to the 1970s Watergate scandal in the United States and eliciting calls for an investigative commission in parliament.

Kaczynski said he saw no reason to set up such a commission, and he denied that the surveillance played any role in the outcome of the 2019 election. "There is nothing here, no fact, except the hysteria of the opposition. There is no Pegasus case, no surveillance," Kaczynski said. □

India sends medicines to Afghanistan, wheat to follow

By ASHOK SHARMA

NEW DELHI (AP) — India delivered two tons of medicines to Afghanistan on Friday, although it has not officially recognized its Taliban government.

The medicine was given to Kabul's Indira Gandhi Hospital, which was set up with Indian assistance in 2004, Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said.

Last month, India supplied Afghanistan with 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines and 1.6 tons of medical supplies through the World Health Organization, Bagchi said in a statement. India also announced that it will provide 50,000 tons of wheat to Afghanistan to ease food shortages there and is working out details of the shipment with Pakistan's government. Pakistan does not allow Indian transport vehicles to use its land route to Afghanistan because of tense relations



Afghan health ministry workers unload boxes of the first shipment of 500,000 doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine made by Serum Institute of India, donated by the Indian government, at the customs area of the Hamid Karzai International Airport, in Kabul, Afghanistan, Sunday, Feb. 7, 2021.

with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Since the chaotic Taliban takeover of Kabul, an al-

ready war-devastated Afghan economy once kept alive by international donations is on the verge of collapse. Nearly 80% of

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Afghanistan's previous government's budget came from the international community. That money, now cut off, financed hospitals,

schools, factories and government ministries.

New Delhi has no diplomatic presence in Kabul after evacuating its staff ahead of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August. It did, however, meet with a Taliban representative in Qatar on Aug. 31.

Before the Taliban took Kabul, India provided Afghan security forces with operational training and military equipment, even though it had no troops on the ground. It also was the region's largest provider of development aid to Afghanistan.

Archrivals India and Pakistan have both long tried to wield influence in Afghanistan to meet their security interests.

India's leaders fear the Taliban's rise to power will benefit Pakistan and feed a long-simmering insurgency in the disputed region of Kashmir, where militants already have a foothold. □

Orthodox Christians observe Christmas amid virus concerns

By JIM HEINTZ
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Orthodox Christians in Russia, Serbia and other countries observed Christmas on Friday amid restrictions aimed at dampening the spread of the coronavirus, but few worshipers appeared concerned as they streamed into churches on Christmas Eve.

The majority of Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7, with midnight services especially popular. The churches in Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece mark the Nativity of Jesus on Dec. 25 along with other Christian denominations.

The Russian Orthodox Church, the largest Orthodox congregation, said celebrants needed to wear masks and observe social distancing at Christmas services. At Moscow's huge Christ The Savior Cathedral, church leader Patriarch Kirill and other gold-robed priests chanted prayers and waved smoking containers of incense during a midnight service.

A live broadcast of the service indicated about half of the worshippers in attendance were without



Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill delivers the Christmas Liturgy in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022.

masks or had them pulled down to their chins as they watched the pageantry.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, also without a mask, attended a service at the Church of the Image of the Saviour Made Without Hands in Novo-Ogaryovo, outside Moscow.

Russia's daily tally of new COVID-19 cases has dropped by about half in the last month, to about 15,000 on Thursday. But

concern is strong that the highly contagious omicron variant may be getting a foothold in the country.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Thursday that officials have detected omicron infections in people who had not traveled outside Russia.

In Serbia's capital, Belgrade, hundreds of worshipers gathered outside St. Sava Temple, the largest Serbian Orthodox church,

for the traditional burning of dried oak branches that symbolize the Yule log. The church also scheduled a midnight Christmas Eve liturgy.

No specific anti-virus measures were announced for Serbia's religious ceremonies despite a huge rise in infections apparently fueled by the omicron variant. Serbia on Thursday reported more than 9,000 new daily cases, the most

Associated Press

in one day since the start of the pandemic.

Health measures in Serbia include mandatory face mask use indoors and limits on gatherings, but the rules have not been fully respected. Vaccination passes are required for bars, restaurants and clubs in the evening but not for churches or other indoor venues.

In his Christmas message, Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Porfirije singled out medical personnel for their work during the public health crisis and said, "I pray for the sick to get well as soon as possible and for the disease that has attacked the world to pass."

"The Church therefore calls during the pandemic for the respect of reasonable measures and recommendations of governments and other authorities in the states and regions in which our people live, but also reminds everyone to avoid exclusion and for respect of human freedom as the highest and most valuable God's gift to men," Porfirije added.

In Kazakhstan, the sizable Orthodox community could not observe Christmas in churches. □

Ethiopia grants amnesty to high-profile political detainees

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's government on Friday announced an amnesty for some of the country's most high-profile political detainees, including opposition figure Jawar Mohammed and senior Tigray party officials, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed spoke of reconciliation for Orthodox Christmas.

"The key to lasting unity is dialogue," the government said in a statement on the amnesty. "Ethiopia will make any sacrifices to this end."

It was the most dramatic move yet by the government after the country's deadly Tigray war entered a new phase in late December, when Tigray forces retreated into their region amid a military offensive and Ethiopian forces said

they would not advance further there.

The war in Africa's second most populous country has highlighted the deadly ethnic tensions posing the greatest challenge to Abiy's rule.

Ethiopia's state broadcaster, EBC, named both Jawar and opposition figure Eskinder Nega, who were detained in July 2020 following deadly unrest over the killing of popular ethnic Oromo artist Hachalu Hundessa, as those granted amnesty. Eskinder, leader of the Balderas party, left a detention center on Friday evening.

But Tuli Bayis, a lawyer for Jawar of the Oromo Federalist Congress party and others, told The Associated Press that they refused to leave the prison facility as



Oromos protest against the government and call for the release of prominent opposition figure Jawar Mohammed and others, seen on placards, during the annual Irreecha festival in the capital Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Oct. 2, 2021.

Associated Press

the order for their release came late in the day.

"They have security risks, so they preferred to exit the correction facility in daytime," Tuli said, adding he was not sure why the order

for their release came now. "We heard it is an amnesty, that's what we know for now."

Ethiopia's ministry of justice said the amnesty for Jawar and Nega was granted "to

make the upcoming national dialogue successful and inclusive." Ethiopian lawmakers on Dec. 29 approved a bill to establish a commission for national dialogue amid international pressure for negotiations to end the war.

The state broadcaster also named several senior officials with Tigray's ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front party as being granted amnesty and said they will be released soon. They include Sebatu Nega, Kidusan Nega, Abay Woldu, Abadi Zemu, Mulu Gebregziabher and Kiros Hagos. They were arrested in late 2020 when government forces captured most of the Tigray region shortly after war erupted between Tigray forces and Ethiopian ones. □

COVID-19 Status on Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and residing our island.

Covid Status:

There are currently 4,755 active cases. 4,122 are residents and 633 non-residents. 181 deceased.

There are 24 persons hospitalized in Aruba of which 3 are in the ICU. Due to lack of staff at the hospital they have to send patients over to Colombia for treatment. There are currently 3 persons at the ICU in Colombia.

Vaccination Status:

A total of 84,191 of the total population has been vaccinated of which 78,627 persons received both shots of the vaccine and 5,564 received only the first shot. Children as young as 12 years are being vaccinated. For the senior population of 60 years and older a total of 21,794 received both shots and 995 received only the first shot. Aruba is administering booster shots to persons 40 and older. As seen around the world, the booster shot provides that extra layer of protection against the Delta variant as well as the Omicron variant, reducing the possible effects when infected with either variant. Persons 40 years and older can now walk-in at the Centro Deportivo Betico Croes in Santa Cruz, from Monday to Friday from 8:00 am - 3:00 pm for their booster vaccine. You do not need an appointment for the Booster Shot.

The measures are as follows as of December 30, 2021

- Curfew: NO Curfew
- Closing Time: 12:00 am for all business for the exception of Casino's which can stay open till 1:00 am
- Restaurants: Max. 6 people per table.
- Social Activities and Sports: Max. people: 60 indoors, 75 outdoors.
- Funerals: Max. people: 75 (if the space is adequately large enough)
- Area Ban 7:00 pm - 5:00 am
- Nightlife: Dancing is not permitted

- Entertainment: Max 5 musicians on stage.
- Gathering Ban: Max. 6 people.
- Shopping: 1 person per family

** Businesses are allowed to lit their pagara until 12:00pm on December 31, 2021.

** Nightlife will be able to stay open until 1:00am on New Year's day instead of 12:00 am.

The following measures remain applicable:

- Masks: Use of masks is mandatory inside at all establishments.
- Alcohol: Ban of alcohol on public roads: 24 hours.
- Social Distancing: Continue maintaining social distance.

New isolation and quarantine guidelines

The Crisis Team, after thorough consideration of the different advice and analysis, has changed the isolation and quarantine guidelines. Once a person gets a positive SARS-CoV-2 test result, the person should isolate for five days and avoid contact with others in the household. The five days of isolation start on the date the person received the positive test result.

If after five days in isolation you still have symptoms, you must continue to isolate until you no longer have symptoms. After 24 hours without any symptoms, the person should complete the form sent by email. Those living in the same house as the person who tested positive should quarantine for 5 days, starting on the day they had immediate contact with the person who tested positive and should wear masks at all times. The person who tested positive must inform others living in the same home about the positive test result. The isolation and quarantine protocols are included in the email sent to anyone who tests positive. Please be aware that the DVG will no longer contact those who tested positive or anyone living in the same household. The DVG urges those who tested positive to complete the form that sent by email and to provide information about everyone living in the same home that needs to quarantine.□

Your Point of View'

ORANJESTAD — Aruba Today encourages you to share your opinion with our readers through our newest column 'Your Point of view'.

Was there a certain situation that you think might have been handled differently? Or perhaps a really nice experience you went through? Maybe you want to just let our readers know how your overall experience was on the island while vacationing here despite the crisis. Let's exchange ideas and experiences related to Aruba.

Send us 'Your Point of View' with your name and where you are from to news@arubatoday.com.

PS. Article will be screened prior to publication. No defamation of people or businesses will be allowed. Only constructive criticism/feedback.

For today we received a letter from a reader from Pennsylvania.

She wrote:

We were scheduled to arrive in Aruba today (Friday, January 7th and depart on Friday, January 14th). We followed the covid guidelines and were tested on Wed. January 5th at 8am exactly 48 hours before departure.

Here it is 50 hours later from testing and still no results which meant we were not allowed to fly to Aruba as scheduled on Friday, Jan 7th.

Our Flight from Newark New Jersey was scheduled to take off at 8am. Meaning our test results needed to be uploaded by 4am. Since we live a distance from the airport we were going to spend the night in New Jersey to be at the airport on time for our flight.

We know since the New Year there has been a huge surge in covid cases and millions of people are being tested. Which delayed our travel test even though we are healthy and do not have covid.

After much consideration we decided at the very last minute to postpone our trip since no test results were available. After many many hours on the phone with the resort and Expedia we were finally able to reschedule for a later date and thank god we didn't have to pay any additional money to do this. We did take out the travel insurance just in case, but this process was stressful and very frustrating not to mention having to rearrange our vacation schedules with our employers.

We are very pleased that Aruba is aware of the pandemic and wants to keep your island Happy and Healthy. But for folks like us that spent a lot of money that want to vacation there, the covid requirements of 2 days if making it very difficult to travel and get our results back in time. Frustration and stress added to the mix makes it very hard to plan.

We are very much looking forward to visiting Aruba late in February if everything works out like it is supposed this time.

Thank you so much for your time and listening to our complaint and hoping the pandemic will be better in the future to make it easier for people to vacation without extra added stress.□



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The only bingo game on the island that offers Progressive Jackpot in all games!

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Dunkin Donuts | Baskin Robbins | Fusion Piano & Wine Bar
Hungry Piranha | Twist of Flavors | Juan Valdez Café
The Brownstone Ribs & Seafood | Subway



Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience!

PALM BEACH - Don't spend a single moment of your long awaited holiday in Aruba thinking about your return testing. The Covid Test Center Aruba located at the Paseo Herencia Mall is your travel ally. Just sit back and relax knowing that, when the time comes, their professional staff will make this process a breeze for you. No need to make an appointment or dread the nasal swab; you'll be done with it in a matter of minutes and back to fun stuff.

Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC.

Covid Test Center @ Paseo is conveniently located at



the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment needed here.

The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as

we are aware it is imperative that this shows accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so.

We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through clear given instructions we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us.

Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at

the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox.

A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.).

For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.□



infini
by Urvin Croes

Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

Join us for an unforgettable experience.



Reserve your seats.
Dinner Awaits!



+297 280 88 69
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Blue Residences: Work & pleasure in paradise

EAGLE BEACH — Dreaming of your own private Caribbean sanctuary is a reality now. Allow us to define this: Blue Residences offers you a condo or penthouse with top notch amenities equal to the offerings of high-class resorts facing the Caribbean Sea, the white-powdered sands of Eagle Beach. According to the Travelers Choice Beaches Award, it is one of the top 25 beaches in the world. And if you don't believe them, you can always read the thousands of positive reviews on TripAdvisor.

Blue Residences is situated in front of The Bubali Plas bird sanctuary and one of the biggest reservoirs on the island. It's also within walking distance to Palm Beach, home of the high-rise luxury hotels. The location is unequalled on the island with a variety of water sports concessions, casinos, restaurants, bars and shops just a leisurely stroll away. The onsite amenities include pools, hot tub, res-

taurant, landscaped sun-deck, fitness center, full service spa and concierge service.

The project has three towers which contains 60 two-bedroom, two-bath units; 32 three-bedroom, three-bath units; 8 one bedroom, one bathroom unit; 4 four-bedroom, four-bath duplex townhouses; 2 five-bedroom, five-and-a-half-bath duplex townhouses; 12 three-bedroom, four-bath duplex penthouses; and 6 five-bedroom, five-and-a-half-bath duplex penthouses.

Penthouse perfection

This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be the owner of one of the hottest spots in the Caribbean and own an amazing, upscale penthouse. There are two levels of 180 degrees of spectacular, ocean-viewing pleasure and amazing daily sunsets await you! Porcelain tiles, Italian-designed kitchens, stainless steel appliances (stove, refrigerator, dishwasher



and microwave), washer and dryer machines and assigned parking space is what you get for a great offer. Take this chance to buy your dream and be part of a builder's organi-

zation with an impeccable reputation who even arrange your short-term and long-term rentals if you are looking for a return on your investment.

Office is set for you

Did you know Aruba has the best internet connection in the whole of the Caribbean?

Did you also know that the island is actually designed for working remotely? All the facilities you need are ready for you, there are even special "workation packages" available.

Yes. The office at Blue Residences is just right for you. With windows all around you for viewing the blue skies and turquoise waters as decoration for an energized, productive day is set.

If you want to rent or buy and live the Blue Residences experience please email Jaime Gomez at jgomez@azure-aruba.com or visit www.bluearuba.com. The sales office is open from Monday to Sundays from 9 am to 5 pm. Go see the amazing view. □

EXPLAINER: What does record inflation mean for the eurozone?

By KELVIN CHAN

AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Inflation in the 19 countries that use the euro currency hit its highest level on record, led by surging food and energy costs, figures released Friday show.

Here's a closer look at the data:

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

Consumer prices in the eurozone, made up of European Union economies like France and Germany, rose 5% in December compared with the previous year, according to Eurostat, the EU's statistics office.

Energy prices led the increase, jumping 26% over the past year, slightly lower than the previous month. The boost in food prices picked up steam to 3.2%, from November's 2.2% rate, and the price of goods rose at a faster pace of 2.9%.

However, price increases for services eased to 2.4%, suggesting that the omicron variant of COVID-19 crimped demand for holiday travel. After stripping out potentially volatile items such as food and energy, the eurozone's core inflation rate held steady at 2.6%.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The latest reading smashes



A light installation is projected onto the building of the European Central Bank during a rehearsal in Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021.

Associated Press

the record of 4.9% set in November and marks the highest level of inflation since recordkeeping for the euro currency began in 1997, two years before its actual launch.

It means everything from food at the grocery store to shopping trips and fuel are costing more as the economic recovery from the pandemic has increased demand for energy and

snarled global supply chains.

The numbers underline how inflation has emerged as one of the main issues that economic policymakers are grappling with.

It compounds pressure for the European Central Bank to act on inflation since it's kept interest rates ultra-low to stimulate an economy recovering from the depths of the pandemic. The arriv-

al of omicron has forced a rethink of any decisions that might throttle economic growth, and analysts don't expect the European bank to raise rates until 2023.

Inflation is not just the EU's problem. Consumer prices in the U.S. have risen at their fastest pace in 39 years, and at their highest clip in more than a decade in Britain. Turkish inflation hit an eye-watering 36% last

month — the highest in 19 years — and Brazil saw it accelerate to more than 10%, the fastest pace in 18 years.

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS THINK?

Some economists think inflation in the eurozone will peak soon, if it hasn't already. One big factor is natural gas prices, "which have been incredibly volatile in recent weeks and a dominant driver of the recent inflation surge," Bert Colijn, senior economist at ING Bank, said in a report. Prices for natural gas and oil in the futures markets suggest energy inflation likely peaked and is set to ease, he said.

Now, "the question is how steep the downward trend will be," Colijn said.

He and other economists predict that core inflation will ease but stay at or above 2% this year, giving the European Central Bank some breathing room when it comes to a rate decision.

WHAT ARE OTHER COUNTRIES DOING?

Despite omicron surging and its uncertain effects on the global economy, central banks have been raising interest rates to fight soaring inflation or taking steps in that direction. □

Airbnb will change process to fight discrimination in Oregon

By DAVID KOENIG

AP Business Writer

Airbnb hosts in Oregon will soon only see the initials of some prospective renters, not their full names, in a change designed to prevent discrimination against Black users of the online lodging marketplace.

The new policy stems from the settlement of a lawsuit that claimed hosts could reject customers because they could conclude that the prospective renters were Black based on their first names.

The change takes effect Jan. 31 and will last for at least two years. It will only apply in Oregon — it won't even cover people from other states trying to rent an Airbnb listing in Oregon,

according to the company.

Civil rights representatives and the company said Thursday that they see the policy as a research tool. "If Black users face fewer incidents of discrimination under this system where you're obscuring first names, then it should be applied nationwide," said Johnny Mathias, an official with Color of Change, which has worked with Airbnb to measure discrimination on the site.

Asked about expanding the initials-only policy, Airbnb spokeswoman Liz DeBold Fusco said, "We want to evaluate the impact of this change first ... to understand if there are learnings from this work that can inform future efforts to fight

bias."

In 2017, three Black women in Oregon sued Airbnb, claiming that the company's requirement that customers post full names and photos enabled hosts to discriminate based on race, in violation of the state's public-accommodations law.

Airbnb changed its policy the following year so that hosts could only see a photo after they accepted a booking. The San Francisco-based company settled the lawsuit in 2019 and posted a message about the new Oregon policy on its site late last month.

Airbnb has previously said it would begin to measure and reduce discrimination that people encounter



The Airbnb app icon is displayed on an iPad screen in Washington, D.C., on May 8, 2021.

Associated Press

when booking or hosting on the site.

"Discrimination is based on perception — and on Airbnb, people perceive race from things like first names and profile photos," the company said in a 2020

blog. The company said that it was working with civil rights groups on research "to understand when and where racial discrimination happens on our platform and the effectiveness of policies that fight it." □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 39 Silver or1 Rock gold
beater 40 Frisco6 Judge's player
place 41 Practical11 Keen joke
12 Maui 42 Bike parts
greeting13 Backpack **DOWN**
part 1 Goes by14 Unyielding 2 Play part
15 Painter 3 MakesFrank baby food,
17 Lennon's maybelove 4 List-
18 Merino ending
mom abbr.19 Et cetera 5 Showing
22 Sinking oversignal 6 Butter
23 Produces unit24 Hardly 7 Yale
coura- rooter

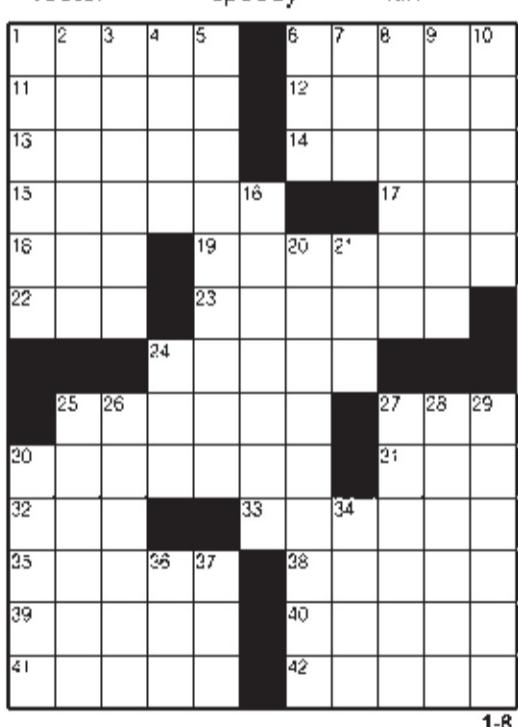
geous

25 Tap type
27 Mercuryor Mars
30 Hold
tightly31 Orang-utan, for
one32 Darling of
baseball

33 Lace's place

35 In the know

38 Dancer Castle

**Yesterday's answer**

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G E R L I O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

I-8**CRYPTOQUOTE**

N G J P T M Z W Z L S X S J M W Q I A Q N

X Q Z I R J Q Q X M C N T X Z

X P J M W R X Z X Q I I J D W Q N T N G J

L M X Q Q . — I T Q G E W V V W Z L Q
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: CHARACTER IS THE
ABILITY TO CARRY OUT A GOOD RESOLUTION
LONG AFTER THE EXCITEMENT OF THE MOMENT
HAS PASSED. CAVETT ROBERT

Will Elizabeth Holmes' conviction sober up Silicon Valley?

Elizabeth Holmes walks into federal court in San Jose, Calif., Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

Associated Press

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE

AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) —

The fraud conviction of former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes could do more than just send a once-celebrated ex-billionaire to prison. In theory, it could also deliver a sobering message to a Silicon Valley culture that often gets lost in its own hubris and swagger.

Will it? Don't hold your breath.

For that change to happen, entrepreneurs would have to dial down their own hype, which could mean losing potential investors to louder startups with fewer qualms. Meanwhile, venture capitalists and other startup investors — always on the lookout for the next big windfall — would need to get a lot more skeptical about the ambitious pitches they're hearing, despite the Valley's decades-long habit of throwing money at a variety of sketchy startup ideas. Most fail, but the rare successes can more than make up for a passel of losers.

"I think it will generate some more caution among entrepreneurs, but for the most part, human nature being what it is, there is still going to be a tendency to exaggerate, especially when you know you might not get funded if you don't," said Richard Greenfield, a lawyer who represents investors in startups.

"And I don't think it will change many investors' attitudes," he added. "People are still going to want to reach for the moon."

Holmes got slapped down hard for going overboard with her relentless sales pitch while running Theranos, a blood-testing startup she founded as a 19-year-old college dropout in 2002.

A jury found her guilty on Monday of duping investors into believing that Theranos had developed a revolutionary medical device that could detect a multitude of diseases and conditions from a few drops of blood. She could face up to 20 years in prison for each of those four convictions, although legal experts say she is unlikely to receive the maximum sentence. The jury also acquitted Holmes of four felony charges accusing her of trying to defraud patients that paid for Theranos blood tests.

Federal prosecutors depicted Holmes as a charlatan obsessed with fame and fortune. In seven days on the witness stand, she cast herself as a visionary trailblazer in male-dominated Silicon Valley who was also a young woman emotionally and sexually abused by her former lover and business partner, Sunny Balwani.

The trial also laid bare the pitfalls of one of the go-to moves of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs — conveying a boundless optimism regardless of whether it's warranted, known as "fake it 'til you make it." That ethos helped hatch groundbreaking companies such as Google, Netflix, Facebook, and Apple — the latter co-founded by one of

Holmes' heroes, Steve Jobs. As soon as Holmes was indicted in 2018, the U.S. Justice Department made it clear they hoped to use her case as a prod that would jolt Silicon Valley — not to mention Big Tech companies that continue to extend their dominance in everyday life — back to reality.

"They wanted to send a message," said Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond who followed the Holmes trial. "Now we shall see whether it's enough to change some of the risky behavior we have been seeing for years."

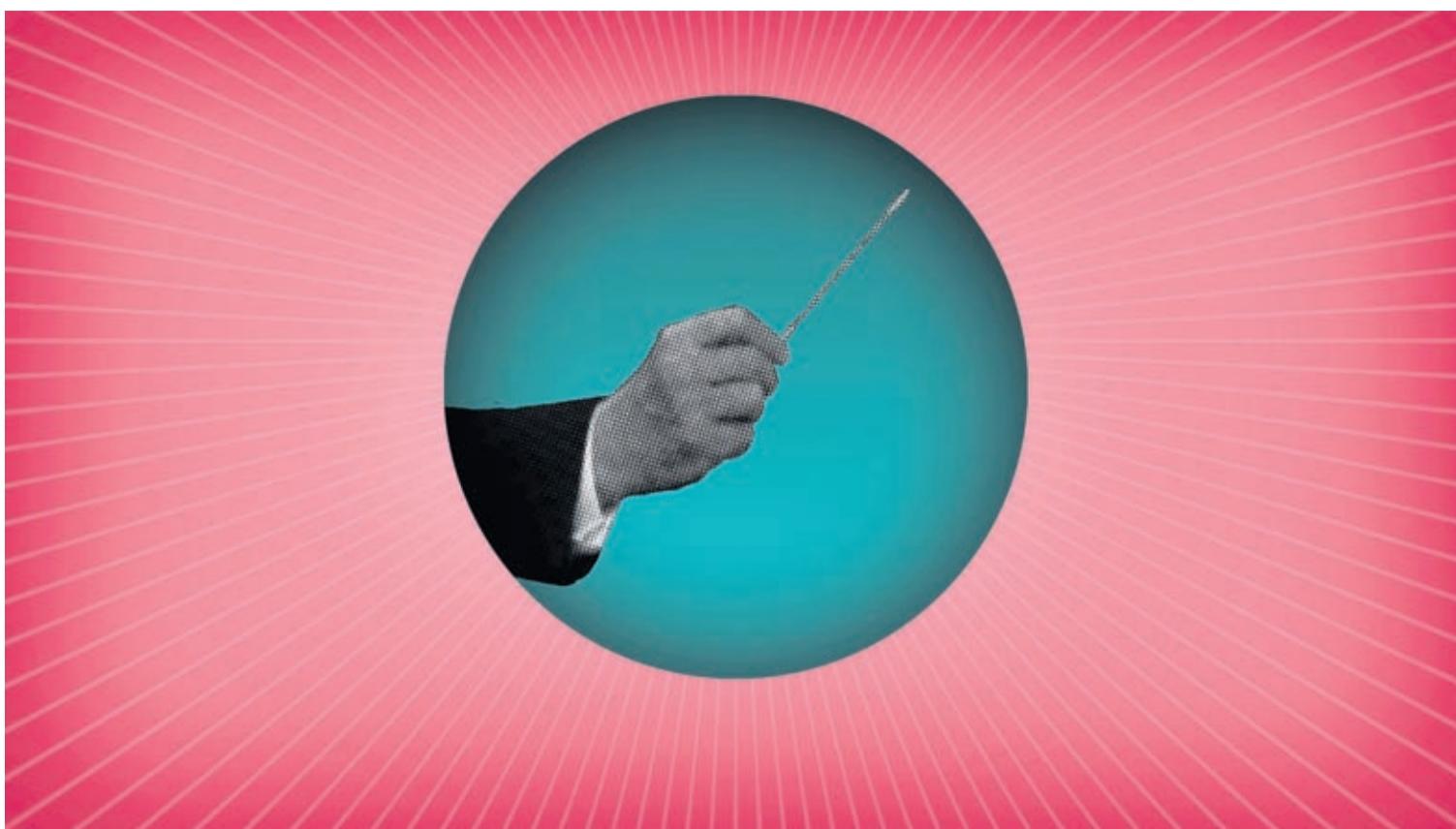
Few expect the Holmes conviction to lower the wattage on the brash promises and bold exaggerations that have become a routine part of the tech industry's innovation hustle.

The Holmes verdict "will send a message to CEOs that there are consequences in overstepping the bounds," suggested Ellen Kreitzberg, a Santa Clara University law professor who attended the trial. On the other hand, she said, "investors are still going to want to make more money on a promising idea. They will always go in for the golden ring."

The bold dream Holmes pursued when she founded Theranos had become a nightmare by the time she was indicted on felony charges in 2018.

She set out to create a less painful, more convenient and cheaper way to scan for hundreds of diseases and other health problems using just a few drops of blood instead of filling vials with blood for each test.

She aimed to upend an industry dominated by giant testing companies such as Quest Diagnostics and Labcorp, starting with setting up "mini-labs" in Walgreens and Safeway stores across the U.S. that would use a small Theranos device called the Edison to run faster, less intrusive blood tests. □



How do I know if I have a cold, the flu or COVID-19?

(Associated Press Illustration/Peter Hamlin)

How do I know if I have a cold, the flu or COVID-19?

By VICTORIA MILKO
AP Science Writer

How do I know if I have a cold, the flu or COVID-19? Experts say testing is the best way to determine what you have since symptoms of the illnesses can overlap.

The viruses that cause colds, the flu and COVID-19 are spread the same way — through droplets from the nose and mouth of infected people. And they can all be spread before a person realizes they're infected.

The time varies for when someone with any of the illnesses will start feeling sick. Some people infected with the coronavirus don't experience any symptoms, but it's still possible for them to spread it.

Cough, fever, tiredness and muscle aches are common to both the flu and COVID-19, says Kristen Coleman, an assistant research professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Symptoms specific to COVID-19 include the loss of taste or smell.

Common colds, meanwhile, tend to be milder with symptoms including a stuffy nose and sore throat. Fevers are more common with the flu.

Despite some false portray-

als online, the viruses have not merged to create a new illness. But it's possible to get the flu and COVID-19 at the same time, which some are calling "flurona." "A co-infection of any kind can be severe or worsen your symptoms altogether," says Coleman. "If influenza cases continue to rise, we can expect to see more of these types of viral co-infections in the coming weeks or months."

With many similar symptoms caused by the three virus types, testing remains the best option to determine which one you may

have. At-home tests for flu aren't as widely available as those for COVID-19, but some pharmacies offer testing for both viruses at the same time, Coleman notes. This can help doctors prescribe the right treatment.

Laboratories might also be able to screen samples for various respiratory viruses, including common cold viruses. But most do not have the capacity to routinely do this, especially during a COVID-19 surge, Coleman says.

Getting vaccinated helps reduce the spread of the

viruses. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it is safe to get a flu and COVID-19 shot or booster at the same time. □

TODAY **BONDIA**

How to reach us!

Downtown

Weststraat, Scheepstraat, Schenkelstraat, Clayia G.F. Bellico Cross, Clayia G.J., Royal Plaza Mall, L.G. Smith Boulevard, Weststraat, High Rise Hotel, Waterfront, Bus terminal.



HEALTH

DOCTOR ON DUTY

Oranjestad

Hospital 7:00 pm / 10:00pm
Tel. 527 4000

San Nicolas

Imsan 24 hours
Tel. 524 8833

PHARMACY ON DUTY

Oranjestad:

Trupiaal Tel. 583 8560

San Nicolas:

San Lucas Tel. 584 5119

OTHER

Dental Clinic 587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	100
Oranjestad	527 3140
Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas 587 5900
Prof. Taxi 588 0035
Taxi D.T.S. 587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba 583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv. 280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport 524 2424
American Airlines 582 2700
Avianca 588 0059
Jet Blue 588 2244
Surinam 582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051

Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118

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Oscar winner and groundbreaking star Sidney Poitier dies

By HILLEL ITALIE

NEW YORK (AP) — Sidney Poitier, who played roles of such dignity and intelligence that he transformed how Black people were portrayed on screen, becoming along the way the first Black actor to win an Oscar for best lead performance and the first to be a top box-office draw, has died. He was 94.

Poitier, winner of the best actor Oscar in 1964 for "Lilies of the Field," died Thursday at his home in Los Angeles, according to Latrae Rahming, the director of communications for the Prime Minister of Bahamas. His close friend and great contemporary Harry Belafonte issued a statement Friday, remembering their extraordinary times together.

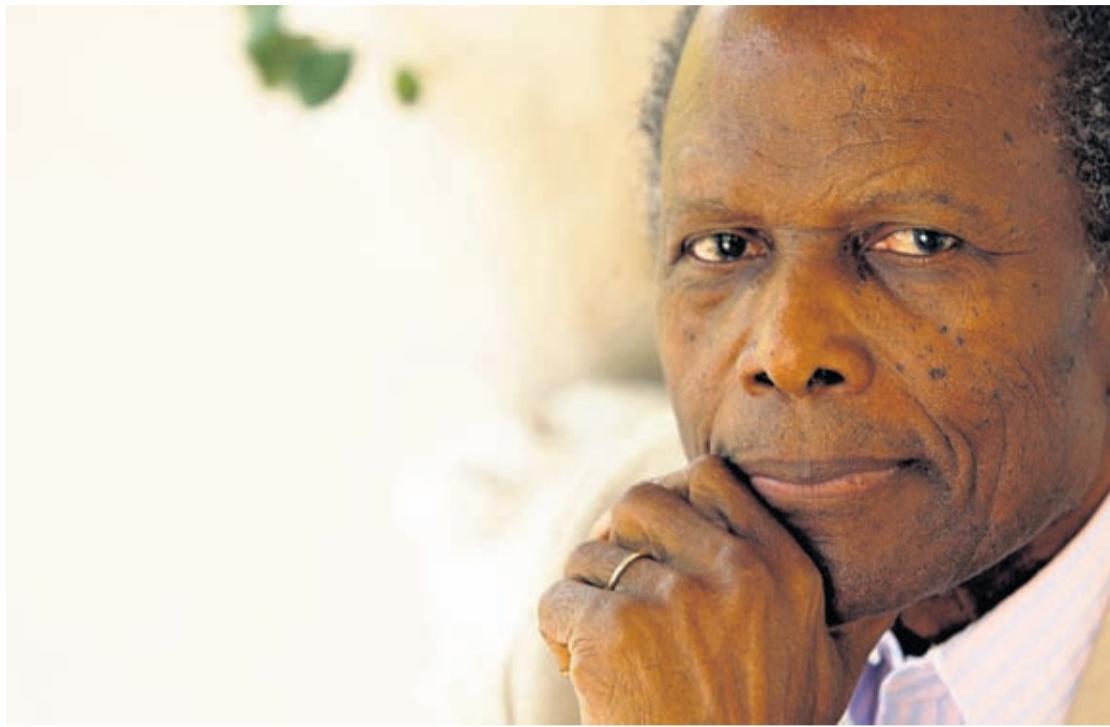
"For over 80 years, Sidney and I laughed, cried and made as much mischief as we could," he wrote. "He was truly my brother and partner in trying to make this world a little better. He certainly made mine a whole lot better."

Few movie stars, Black or white, had such an influence both on and off the screen. Before Poitier, no Black actor had a sustained career as a lead performer and rarely was one permitted a break from the stereotypes of bug-eyed servants and grinning entertainers.

Poitier, the son of Bahaman tomato farmers, appeared in more than 25 films during the 1950s and 1960s and his rise paralleled the growth of the civil rights movement. As racial attitudes evolved and segregation laws were challenged and fell, Poitier was the performer to whom a cautious Hollywood turned for stories of progress.

He was the escaped Black convict who befriends a racist white prisoner (Tony Curtis) in "The Defiant Ones." He was the courtly office worker who falls in love with a blind white girl in "A Patch of Blue." He was the handyman in "Lilies of the Field" who builds a church for a group of nuns.

With his handsome, flawless face, intense stare and



Actor Sidney Poitier poses for a portrait in Beverly Hills, Calif. on June 2, 2008.

Associated Press

disciplined style, Poitier was for years not just the most popular Black movie star, but the only one.

"I made films when the only other Black on the lot was the shoeshine boy," he recalled in a 1988 Newsweek interview. "I was kind of the lone guy in town."

Poitier peaked in 1967 with three of the year's most notable movies: "To Sir, With Love," in which he starred as a school teacher who wins over his unruly students at a London secondary school; "In the Heat of the Night," as the determined police detective Virgil Tibbs; and in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," as the prominent doctor who wishes to marry a young white woman he only recently met, her parents played by Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn in their final film together.

His unique appeal brought him the same burdens as other pioneers such as Jackie Robinson and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. He was subjected to bigotry from whites and accusations of compromise from the Black community. Poitier was held, and held himself, to standards well above his white peers. He refused to play villains or cads and took on characters, especially in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," of almost divine goodness. He developed an even, but

resolved and occasionally humorous persona crystallized in his most famous line — "They call me Mr. Tibbs!" — from "In the Heat of the Night."

But even in his prime he was criticized for being out of touch. He was called an Uncle Tom and a "million-dollar shoeshine boy." In 1967, The New York Times published Black playwright Clifford Mason's essay, "Why Does White America Love Sidney Poitier So?" Mason dismissed Poitier's films as "a schizophrenic flight from historical fact" and the actor as a pawn for the "white man's sense of what's wrong with the world."

Stardom didn't shield Poitier from racism or condescension. He had a hard time finding housing in Los Angeles and was followed by the Ku Klux Klan when he visited Mississippi in 1964, not long after three civil rights workers had been murdered there. In interviews, journalists often ignored his work and asked him instead about race and current events.

"I am an artist, man, American, contemporary," he snapped during a 1967 press conference. "I am an awful lot of things, so I wish you would pay me the respect due."

Poitier was not as engaged politically as his friend and contemporary Belafonte,

but he participated in the 1963 March on Washington and other civil rights events, and as an actor defended himself and risked his career. He refused to sign loyalty oaths during the 1950s, when Hollywood was blacklisting suspected Communists, and turned down roles he found offensive.

"Almost all the job opportunities were reflective of the stereotypical perception of Blacks that had infected the whole consciousness of the country," he recalled. "I came with an inability to do those things. It just wasn't in me. I had chosen to use my work as a reflection of my values."

Poitier's films were usually about personal triumphs rather than broad political themes, but the classic Poitier role, from "The Defiant Ones" to "In the Heat of the Night," seemed to mirror the drama King played out in real life: A composed Black man — Poitier became synonymous with the word "dignified" — who shames the whites opposed to him.

His screen career faded in the late 1960s as political movements, Black and white, became more radical and movies more explicit. He acted less often, gave fewer interviews and began directing, his credits including the Richard Pryor-Gene Wilder farce

"Stir Crazy," "Buck and the Preacher" (co-starring Poitier and Belafonte) and the Bill Cosby comedies "Uptown Saturday Night" and "Let's Do It Again."

In the 1980s and '90s, he appeared in the feature films "Sneakers" and "The Jackal" and several television movies, receiving an Emmy and Golden Globe nomination as future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in "Separate But Equal" and an Emmy nomination for his portrayal of Nelson Mandela in "Mandela and De Klerk." Theatergoers were reminded of the actor through an acclaimed play that featured him in name only: John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation," about a con artist claiming to be Poitier's son.

In recent years, a new generation learned of him through Oprah Winfrey, who idolized Poitier and chose his memoir "The Measure of a Man" for her book club. He also welcomed the rise of such Black stars as Denzel Washington, Will Smith and Danny Glover: "It's like the cavalry coming to relieve the troops! You have no idea how pleased I am," he said.

Poitier received numerous honorary prizes, including a lifetime achievement award from the American Film Institute and a special Academy Award in 2002, on the same night that Black actors won both best acting awards, Washington for "Training Day" and Halle Berry for "Monster's Ball."

"I'll always be chasing you, Sidney," Washington, who had earlier presented the honorary award to Poitier, said during his acceptance speech. "I'll always be following in your footsteps. There's nothing I would rather do, sir, nothing I would rather do." In 2009 President Barack Obama, whose own steady bearing was sometimes compared to Poitier's, awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, saying that the actor "not only entertained but enlightened... revealing the power of the silver screen to bring us closer together." □

U.S. Women's Open purse soars to \$10 million on fabled courses

By DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

Long considered the biggest event in women's golf, the U.S. Women's Open now has prize money and future sites to match.

The U.S. Golf Association announced Friday the purse will nearly double this year to \$10 million, by far the richest in women's golf and challenging top prizes in women's sports.

The purse was \$5.5 million when Yuka Saso won at Olympic Club last year.

Helping to make it possible was the USGA bringing on a presenting sponsor — Ohio-based ProMedica, a not-for-profit integrated health organization serving 28 states.

With ProMedica's backing, the U.S. Women's Open purse plans to increase to \$11 million and eventually \$12 million over the next five years.

Along with a massive jump in money, the USGA is sending the women to some of the classic U.S. Open designs that for decades have hosted the men. That list includes a return to Oakmont and Pinehurst No. 2, along with Riviera, Oakland Hills, Merion, Inverness and Interlachen.

The USGA said Pinehurst would host the men's and women's Open in successive weeks in 2029, just as it did in a highly successful debut in 2014. Martin Kaymer won the U.S. Open, and Michelle Wie captured her first major at the U.S. Women's Open the following week.

It's the first major initiative by the USGA since Mike Whan, the former LPGA Tour commissioner, took over as CEO last summer.

"The USGA prides itself on conducting championships that not only provide an incredible stage for the athletes, but also give younger players something to dream about," Whan said. "For more than 75 years, the U.S. Women's Open has been the one that every little girl, in every country around the world, has dreamed of winning."

He said the partnership with ProMedica helps make that



Yuka Saso, of the Philippines, celebrates her victory in the U.S. Women's Open golf tournament at The Olympic Club, June 6, 2021, in San Francisco

happen. The health group also will be a marketing partner of the USGA, and its "ProMedica Impact Fund" will be the official charity of the Women's Open. The fund is committed to raising more than \$1 billion over eight years for programs geared toward improving individual and community health.

"We'll push to change the game and what it means to young women worldwide in order to reach new heights every year," Whan said.

The Women's Open is June 2-5 at Pine Needles Lodge in North Carolina, and then it moves to Pebble Beach for the first time the following year. Pebble Beach was already on the schedule.

Pine Needles has a short but strong history of the Women's Open, with a list of champions that include Annika Sorenstam, Karrie

Webb and Cristie Kerr. Only once had it gone to Pinehurst — the back-to-back weeks in 2014 — and Pine Needles was among the venues that could be labeled as the courses where the women played the Open.

The future lineup is filled with historic courses, such as Riviera and Merion, which have hosted U.S. Open over the years.

The announcement came two months after the LPGA Tour announced a 2022 schedule with 34 tournaments and higher purses. The U.S. Women's Open increase pushes the total

prize money for the year just over \$90 million.

"This is an exciting day for the LPGA, women's golf and women's sports more broadly," LPGA Commissioner Mollie Marcoux Saamaan said. "We applaud our friends at the USGA and ProMedica for their vision and dedication to supporting the world's best female golfers."

"With this elevated purse and a phenomenal list of world-class upcoming venues, the U.S. Women's Open has not only cemented its place as one of the leading events on our global tour, but also as one of the

Associated Press

most impactful women's sports events in the world."

Most telling among new sites was Oakland Hills on the list.

The Detroit-area course recently went through a major renovation under Gil Hanse, whose architecture firm was chosen to design the Olympic Golf Course in Rio for the 2016 Olympics. It has been trying to land a U.S. Open for the seventh time. Oakland Hills is where Ben Hogan famously "brought this course, this monster" to its knees when he won the Open in 1951, but it hasn't held the men's Open since 1996.

Hogan also won in 1948 at Riviera in Los Angeles, now site of the Genesis Invitational on the PGA Tour. It remains one of the more fabled stops on the West Coast, but was seen as not having enough room for all the infrastructure required for a men's major, such as the U.S. Open.

Inverness in Toledo, Ohio, most recently hosted the Solheim Cup.

The Women's Open also is returning to Interlachen outside Minneapolis for the first time since Inbee Park won her first Women's Open in 2008. That will be played in 2030, the 100th anniversary of Bobby Jones winning the U.S. Open during his "impregnable quadrilateral" sweep of the four biggest golf tournaments of his day.

It was not immediately clear how much the winner would receive at the U.S. Women's Open. Saso earned slightly more than the typical 18% of the purse, with the USGA wanting to provide the biggest payoff at \$1 million.

The prize money for the men's U.S. Open last year was \$12.5 million. The purse for this year's event hasn't been decided yet. □

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